



Chris Danou's Capitol Report
Celebrate Cooperatives this Month

Cooperatives have a proud history and lasting presence in our community, state and nation. Our nation's first cooperative was a town mutual insurance company in Philadelphia that was organized by founding father Benjamin Franklin in 1752. Over the course of the following two hundred years, cooperatives spread across the country and became anchors in farming and rural communities. In 1964, the month of October was declared "Cooperative Month" by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, and former Minnesota Governor Orville Freeman.

Every October gives cooperatives the chance to celebrate accomplishments and educate the public about the member-owned and member-controlled business model in which they operate. Today, there are thousands of cooperatives operating in all kinds of industries throughout the world with a heavy concentration in Minnesota and Wisconsin. When big businesses decided it wasn't worth their time or financial resources to include rural areas in their business plan, local businesses joined forces to make sure rural areas had access to the same kinds of essential services of more populated communities.

Co-ops market and supply all kinds of things that are essential to our economy and day-to-day life. From just about every type of agricultural product to food products, health care, housing, credit union services, insurance, energy, telephone and telecommunications, and electric services, co-ops not only provide quality products and services at an affordable price that is driven by service instead of profit. Co-ops employ local residents and also make significant contributions to the community through economic development, scholarships, education programs, grants and local aid to communities in a time of need caused by natural disasters.

Co-ops truly have a major presence in our community and across Wisconsin. In fact, co-ops contribute around \$8.6 billion annually in revenue and employ about 19,000 people in Wisconsin alone. Co-ops have an international reach and impact as well. A few years ago, co-ops celebrated the International Year of Cooperatives, as proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly to recognize the diversity of the cooperative movement around the world and the role of cooperative business model in achieving economic viability while also contributing community and social benefits.

This year, co-ops in Wisconsin are celebrating Cooperative Month with the theme, "Take Ownership." The Cooperative Network, the largest statewide association of its kind that brings cooperatives together from Wisconsin and Minnesota, is celebrating this year's theme by highlighting how the cooperative business model gives consumers and workers a real stake in their economic destinies. From attending an annual meeting to serving on the cooperative's board of directors, members are educated on the issues and are encouraged to be actively involved in setting policies and shaping the future of the cooperative. Since cooperatives are member-owned and controlled, those decisions are made with the best interests of co-op members in mind versus making decisions that center around financially benefitting corporate stockholders.

Indeed, chances are co-ops touch just about every family in our community in some way. Cooperatives have made lasting contributions and they continue to be a major presence in our community and local economy. As your State Representative, I'm proud to support the cooperative model and all the co-ops in our area during Cooperative Month. Please join me and take a moment to remember the presence, service and value of all the cooperatives in our community!

